

**TESTIMONY OF SYLVIA HURTADO, CHAIR  
BOARD OF ADMISSIONS AND RELATIONS WITH SCHOOLS (BOARS)  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC SENATE**

**BEFORE THE SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE MASTER PLAN  
FEBRUARY 2, 2010**

Honorable Assemblymember Ruskin  
Joint Legislative Committee on the Master Plan  
Members of the Assembly,

I welcomed the opportunity to provide testimony today. My experience in higher education began as an undergraduate and then professional in college admissions. I am director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. Previously, I directed the higher education center at the University of Michigan and was part of the research team that provided evidence on the educational benefits of diversity for the 2003 Supreme Court decision on admissions. I have five years of service on BOARS, the faculty senate committee charged with the development and oversight of admissions policy at the University of California.

The Master Plan was written as an ideal set of principles that embraced maintaining both selective as well as broad access higher education in the state of CA. While it was successful in increasing educational opportunity, today's realities of college admission are far beyond what was initially envisioned. The Master Plan did not anticipate that a demand for postsecondary education would rise, particularly at selective institutions, and that the disparities in educational opportunity between racial/ethnic populations would be sustained. I will highlight several important developments, and speak about UC's commitment to the essential principles of the Master Plan in this new context.

**High Demand for Access to UC**

Applications have risen dramatically to the UC system, and despite projected declines in the number of high school graduates, they continue to rise. For 2010, we have over 134,000 applicants, of these 81,991 are resident applicants at the freshman level or 18.5% of CA public high school graduates, and 29,396 at the transfer level. With over 70% of freshmen applicants seeking admission to either Berkeley or UCLA, these two campuses have become among the

most selective institutions in the country. At the same time, the UC system remains an engine of social mobility, accommodating the highest percentage of low-income students than other public institutions—both UCLA and UCB enroll the highest percentage of low-income students for their level of selectivity. This is possible because campuses use a broad range of criteria in selecting students, which I will describe in a moment. When demand is high, we have also been able to identify and accommodate top students, and thus the last eight years show steady increases in applicants as well as admits. The opening of the Merced campus has assisted with increased demand. However, in years where enrollment constraints are imposed because of the state budget, as occurred in 2005 and 2009, we have seen a reduction in freshman admits that also results in declines in low-income, first generation, and underrepresented minorities. These state budget constraints also place limits on current projections for enrollment growth at UC that prevent closing the gaps between groups in a high demand context for UC access.

#### **UC Responds to Restrictions on the Use of Race and Gender in Admissions**

At the same time as this demand increased, there was a concerted effort to impose race neutral policies that hampered the ability to close longstanding gaps among underrepresented populations in access to UC. The Academic Senate opposed these efforts when the Regents passed Special Policy 1 and 2. In 1998, we worked with the Regents to institute Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC), requiring campuses to extend admission to the top 4% of students in every CA high school. This proved to be a successful program in recruiting students who had previously not considered UC as an option. After high schools submit student transcripts for evaluation of a-g coursework by UC, students received a letter recognizing their accomplishments informing them of the final steps they must take to be guaranteed admission. ELC students admitted to UC show high GPAs and persistence rates, and high levels of academic and civic engagement. *BOARS views the ELC program as a significant success and because of this the ELC guarantee will expand from 4% to 9% of every high school in 2012.*

In 2001, the UC Regents reaffirmed the Academic Senate's authority under Standing Order 105.2(a)4 to determine the conditions for admission to UC. In doing so, BOARS seeks to meet the Regents' mandate, articulated in a May 2001 Resolution,<sup>5</sup> to "enroll a student body that

demonstrates high academic achievement or exceptional personal talent, and that encompasses the broad diversity of backgrounds characteristic of California.” Spawned by the passage of 209, faculty adopted comprehensive review processes in selective admissions to achieve the Regents’ mandate of “inclusive excellence.” These CR processes follow guidelines of 14 criteria established by BOARS that include the evaluation of individual students within the context of opportunity in their schools, and information available in students’ files about academic and personal accomplishments.

Comprehensive review processes identify students who strive for excellence and exceed the opportunity structures in their high schools, exhibit exceptional leadership or talent in the arts or science, or make extraordinary civic contributions (like one student who led a community against the use of pesticides where families labor daily), or a veteran who demonstrates leadership in service to the country, or exemplifies determination to overcome exceptional life challenges. Each campus uses a comprehensive review process before a final admissions decision is rendered. Such context-sensitive review has long been regarded as a common-sense best practice among highly selective institutions across the country. Other states, such as the University of Washington, have abandoned an index in favor of evaluating applicants based on the merits of each case. Both comprehensive review and ELC helped to not only identify new reserves of talent for UC, but also restore some of the diversity lost in the aftermath of Proposition 209.

### **UC Reform of Eligibility**

The Master Plan set the 12.5% standard to assure UC selects from only among the top students in the State. However, the authority was left to the University, and more importantly to the faculty to determine eligibility and also the criteria by which students would be selected. To this day, UC has admitted all eligible students to some campus but this is only because we have adjusted an index (the mechanism by which we define eligibility). *Instead, of simply adjusting an index to narrow the number of eligible students, the faculty thought we should be encouraging many more students to take the right courses, become college ready, and aim high.* Most importantly the index was a very narrow definition of student talent, many qualified students with strong credentials were either discouraged from applying and if they did apply they entered the pools as “ineligible.”

After several years of study, the faculty at UC introduced a new eligibility policy passed by the Regents in 2008 to take effect in 2012. A key principle of the Master Plan was to extend opportunity, in the same way the reform of eligibility will “cast a wider net” in the goal of identifying more high achieving students for admission to UC. The reform: 1) eliminates the subject tests as a significant barrier to eligibility, a test the faculty judged had a higher social cost than utility in decision-making, and made it optional in admissions; 2) extends the guarantee of admission in *every* CA high school to the top 9%, which is estimated to double the number of ELC students in most schools, and maps directly onto demographics of the state; and 3) allows more students to make their best case in comprehensive review based on their academic and personal accomplishments. Students are entitled to a review if they have 11 a-g courses by the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, have HS GPA of 3.0 or above, and take one core admission test (ACT or SAT with writing). We also intend to keep the state-wide index but only for a smaller number of students (9%). An estimated 10% will receive a guarantee of admission somewhere in the system and campuses will select additional students that they deem are among the top in their applicant pools based on enrollment targets designed to stay within the parameters of the Master Plan. What does the reform do? It gives more students a fair shot at UC, encourages students to aim high, and allows campuses to use broad criteria to select the top students. Extraordinary achievement will be rewarded particularly in light of the challenges students face within the context of opportunity in their schools.

Today, selection for admission at UC is driven by:

- 1) The realities of institutional capacity based on enrollment targets that are driven by the state budget; students are only guaranteed a place where there is space available (that will likely only be at Merced in the future);
- 2) The applicant pool, which determines how selective each campus becomes and also how competitive the pools are; the LAO office claims we are dipping into CSU’s pool with a new policy—this is not a concern because of the very high level of competition among students for a very limited number of slots in admission to UC (We have 31,455 spaces for nearly 82 thousand applicants), and UC faculty maintain very high standards for identifying the best students;
- 3) Review processes that include broad criteria of academic and personal accomplishment; this is necessary to achieve both diversity and excellence at UC.

4) Student preparation—by far the biggest disparity for high school graduates in terms of preparation for UC or CSU is the ability to enroll and be successful in a-g coursework in high schools. Currently, teachers at CA high schools submit their courses for a-g approval. UC reviews an average of 18,000 courses per year, and works with teachers to improve their courses to meet standards for college-level preparation. Most recently, a significant effort has been made to assist in the development and review of Career Technical Education courses to meet a-g requirements. In 2000, only 258 CTE courses met a-g requirements, now 7650 CTE courses meet a-g requirements. Creating more a-g courses in high schools, based on rigorous curriculum standards is a top priority.

UC is working to close the gaps, but there are significant disparities that still hinder access for the most vulnerable populations. This includes a counselor shortage, fewer a-g and advanced courses in schools serving high numbers or underrepresented groups, and shortages of qualified teachers in schools that serve large numbers of African America, Chicano/Latino, and Native Americans.

The Master Plan does not address the continuing educational disparities that prevent student access, and the initial assumption was that the costs of a public education will remain extremely low for individuals—both of these are significant determinants of access. The original Master Plan was hailed an elegant way of dividing function and resources for a growing population that demanded access. The demand for access remains unabated, and it seems the Plan should identify areas for *greater collaboration* where segments can develop more effective pathways in moving more CA students toward baccalaureate completion.

In the Area of Transfer Admissions, I offer three examples of intersegmental cooperation:

ASSIST Online Articulation Tool: The community colleges, the CSU and UC have successfully collaborated over the last 25 years to provide detail course articulation information to prospective transfer students. More recently, the segments have agreed upon a vision for an

reinvigorated ASSIST tool which will streamline the work of course articulation and enhance student advisement.

**Streamlining Initiative:** In 2006-07 UC faculty developed transfer paths that summarize and easily communicate essential lower-division major preparation for students wishing to transfer to any UC in the top 20 majors.

**ICAS Establishes Competencies for College Success:** Over the last 20 years, CCC, CSU and UC have regularly come together to develop academic competency statements in a number of core academic areas including academic literacy, mathematics, laboratory science and language other than English (among others) that provide specific guidance to schools regarding the academic competencies expected for incoming students. Not only do the competency statements spell out the content knowledge expected for these students, they also detail the skills and experiences (e.g. critical and analytical thinking, etc.) that faculty believe will contribute to a student's success at our institutions.

These are but a few examples of cooperation and sharing of resources to improve student access. Thanks much for your time, I will take questions later.